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PRESS RELEASE

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TAPOL calls for release of East Timor resistance leader

The Indonesian army announced today that Xanana Gusmão, the leader of the East Timor resistance movement, was arrested in Dili early this morning and is now undergoing intense questioning. There has been no independent confirmation of Xanana's arrest.

The international community has long recognised Xanana Gusmao as the undisputed leader of East Timor's courageous resistance to its invasion and annexation by Indonesia in 1975. He has led the resistance movement with great courage, foresight and determination since 1980, having restored the movement's fortunes after the severe defeat it suffered in the late 1970s. Xanana has long been the symbol of resistance for both the older and younger generations of East Timorese.

The Indonesian army is known to treat their political prisoners with extreme brutality. If Xanana Gusmao is now in their hands, it is essential for him to be given full protection by the international community. The International Red Cross should be given immediate access.

TAPOL most vigorously protests against the arrest of the resistance leader and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

As leader of the national resistance, Xanana Gusmao has a crucial role to play in the talks about the future of East Timor which are now underway under UN auspices. The UN Secretary-General Dr Boutros-Ghali is understood to be planning to hold consultations with representatives of the East Timorese people as part of this process. Xanana Gusmao must not be prevented from taking part in these consultations.

TAPOL has called on the UN Secretary-General and the British government to press for Xanana's immediate release, to do everything possible to ensure his safety, and ensure that he will be able to participate in consultations about the future of East Timor.

For further information, call Carmel Budiardjo or Liem Soei Liong on 081 771-2904.